

It is very common for people with dementia, or any other brain injury, to behave in an aggressive manner. This may take the form of verbal abuse, damage to property, or physical violence. It is important to avoid interpreting this behaviour as if it came from a healthy person.

The greatest aggression is often directed at the closest relatives. This is because you are there and are perhaps a safer target. It is not personal or calculated. Do not fall into the trap of reading anything further into this aggression, such as that they are getting their own back on you, or that they hate you.

The best way of coping is firstly to identify potential triggers; secondly to identify preventative measures; thirdly to identify ways of coping; and fourthly to identify ways of coping with yourself afterwards.

### ■ Common triggers

- ◆ Feeling humiliated if forced to accept help with intimate functions.
- ◆ Feeling a failure for not coping.
- ◆ Feeling pressurised.
- ◆ Misunderstanding events, for example accusing people of stealing when the patient has mislaid something.
- ◆ Fear – no longer recognising people.
- ◆ Boredom, having excess energy.
- ◆ Feeling ill or in pain.

### ■ Preventative measures

- ◆ Create a calm, stress-free environment in which the patient does not feel confused or rushed.
- ◆ Explain what is happening – give a running commentary.
- ◆ Encourage independence – offer help but don't take over.
- ◆ Avoid confrontation by distracting attention.

- ◆ Praise achievement and avoid criticism.
- ◆ Make sure the sufferer has plenty of exercise and interest.
- ◆ Try to avoid direct requests such as 'Don't do that', or 'Get dressed now'.

### ■ Coping with aggression

- ◆ React calmly, don't argue or raise your voice, try to show no fear, count to ten (or 20).
- ◆ Do not take personal offence, it is part of the illness.
- ◆ Do not use punishment.
- ◆ Allow the sufferer plenty of personal space – do not get too close or cornered, or attempt to lead them away.
- ◆ Defuse the situation by distraction and providing alternative activities.
- ◆ Bear in mind forgetfulness is an advantage, they are likely to quickly forget the episode.

### ■ Coping with yourself

- ◆ Try to remain detached – do not be provoked.
- ◆ Do not feel guilty if you are provoked – you are under great stress.
- ◆ Do not bottle it up – go and talk to somebody.
- ◆ Try not to take it personally, you may get the brunt of the aggression because you are a safe target.